

STUDENTS' DOMINANT MISTAKES IN LEARNING FORMS OF OTHER, GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES¹

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Abstract

This study is a descriptive quantitative study which aims at finding out the dominant frequency of mistakes on the use of *forms of other, gerunds and infinitives* made by the students of Structure II (ING-105) course at the English education study program of faculty of teacher training and education of University of Bengkulu. The subjects of the study were 36 students and the total sampling was applied. The data was collected by using a set of questionnaire constructed based on the syllabus on the material of forms of others, gerunds and infinitives and then was counted and analyzed by using percentage formula to find out the dominant mistakes. The finding shows that the students made more mistakes on gerunds and infinitives material especially on *special expression followed by -ing, gerunds as the object of prepositions and common verbs followed by gerunds*. Meanwhile on the forms of others materials, the students made more mistakes on the use of *another as singular adjective and the other as plural adjective*. Hopefully the findings can be beneficial information for the grammar teachers for further improvement of the teaching of English grammar especially on the forms of others, gerunds and infinitives.

Keywords: Mistakes, forms of others, gerunds and infinitives.

Introduction

In Indonesia, English grammar is still regarded as difficult and boring subject to learn and that was caused by some factors that related the condition of English status in Indonesia. Refnita (2007) stated that the factors are students' lack of motivation, the differences existing between English grammar and Indonesian grammar, and the students' psychological and emotional conditions. Refnita (2007) also argued that the difference between English grammar and Indonesian is one of the factors that inhibit the mastering of English by Indonesian students, especially the university students. Likewise, Yunita (2004) stated that "even though the students have learnt English compulsorily since they were in junior high school until senior high school, most of the students still cannot communicate in English well".

Moreover, beside the significant different of the languages' grammar, the widest scope of English grammar also gave contribution in inhibiting the mastering of the English language. This area of grammar is not similar to the four language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. This opinion is supported by Larsen-Freeman (1991) who states that grammar and vocabulary are in the area of knowledge, while writing, reading, speaking, and listening are in the area of skills, but both of them are closely related. Furthermore, learning a new language grammar or structure, if it has many differences from the learners' native language, can confuse the learners. Learning English grammar can sometime become complicated and difficult. The factors above can give contribution and lead students in making mistakes in using the English language. These conditions are also experienced by the students at the English education study program of University of Bengkulu. They still have problems in using the forms of others, gerunds and infinitives of English

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grammar. The mistakes they made in using those parts of English grammar were investigated in a study conducted by the writer in 2008. The data and information presented here were derived from the study. The study was an attempt to find out the most frequent mistakes made by the students and will be discussed in further in this paper.



Making mistakes in learning a language can't be avoided. There is always a chance of making mistakes or errors in the process of learning a language. The underlying assumption is that students' errors or mistakes in grammar are systematic and classifiable. Brown (2000) proposes that mistakes refer to a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. In addition, mistakes are unsystematic errors of learners, as opposed to the systematic errors of learners, from which learners are able to reconstruct their knowledge of the language to date (Corder in Ho, 2003). In addition, Edge in Harmer (2003) divide mistakes into three broad categories. They are; first, 'slips' that are mistakes which students can correct by themselves once the mistakes have been pointed out to them. Second, 'errors' that are the mistakes they cannot correct themselves and therefore need explanation. The last is 'attempt' that is when a student tries to say something but does not yet know the correct way of saying it. From the opinions above it can be inferred that mistakes or errors are systematic, classifiable and occur as the manifestation of learning.

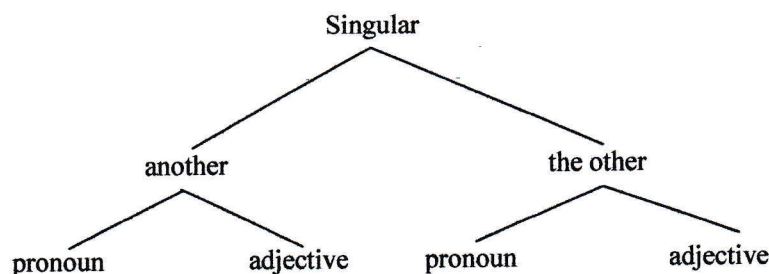
Mistakes or errors in particular were made by students in learning a language which can derive from several causes or sources. Brown (2000) categorizes the causes or the sources of mistakes into three broad categories. The first source is called *interlingual transfer* that is the condition where the learner of the language influenced by their first language system in learning the language. It is also known as *the negative interlingual transfer*. The second is the *intralingual transfer* that is known as generalization within the target language. In intralingual, there is also a term named *negative intralingual transfer* or overgeneralization. The third source is called *context of learning* that is the classroom with it teachers and the material, and the other is the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. The last one is *the communication strategies*, which is defined and related to the students' learning styles. Language learners obviously use production strategies in order to enhance getting their messages across, but at times these techniques can become themselves as the source of error.

Next, Harmer (2003) proposes two distinct causes of mistakes or errors. They are *L1 interference*, the condition when the learner first language (L1) is exposed to each other; there is often confusion, which provokes errors in a learner's use of English. The next is *the developmental error* or also called as over-generalization, that is the situation where a learner over-generalizes a new rule that has been (subconsciously) learnt and as the result they even make mistakes with things that s/he knew before.

Likewise, Erdogan (2005) categorized the sources of errors within two domains; interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. Interlingual transfer is the errors which occur as the result of language transfer that caused by the learner's first language and they are regarded as signs that the learner is internalizing and investigating the system of the new language. Meanwhile, intralingual transfer or developmental errors are the errors that common in the speech of second language learners, irrespective of their mother tongue. They are the result of faultiness or partial learning of the target language that may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another. In addition, they occur as a result of learner's attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it. From the opinions above, it can be concluded that the sources or the cause of errors are the students' first language, the process of learning and the context of where the language learning take place.

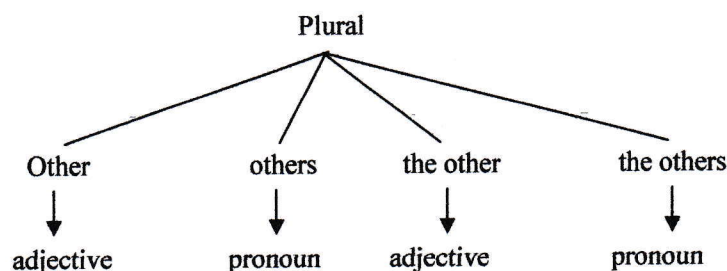
As mention previously, the parts of English grammar which are discussed in this paper are the forms of other, gerunds and infinitives. The forms of other are one part of English language that is sometime called quantifier. They have two functions and two kinds. The first function is as a pronoun and another is as adjective or demonstrative adjective. While from the kinds, there are singular and plural forms of other. The clear kinds and functions of the forms of other can be seen in the following figure 1 and 2:

Figure 1: Singular Forms of Other.



- Ex.: (1) Rahmat receives three letters today. One is from his friend in Australia, another (singular pronoun) is from his brother in Japan and the other (singular pronoun) is from his sister in Switzerland.
- (2) Rahmat receives three letters today. One is from his friend in Australia, another letter (singular adjective) is from his brother in Japan and the other letter (singular adjective) is from his sister in Switzerland.

Figure 2: Plural Forms of Other.



- Ex.: (1) Zahra reads the Jakarta Post every day. She doesn't read any other (adjective plural) newspapers.
- (2) I want to borrow some grammar books. Do you have any others (pronoun plural) that you could lend me?
- (3) Reni wants to travel to four beautiful cities in the world. One is Toronto, another city is Sydney. The other (adjective plural) cities are Paris and Alexandria.
- (4) I have four beautiful traditional costumes. One is from West Sumatera, another is from South Sulawesi, and the others (pronoun plural) are from South Kalimantan and Bengkulu.

The next part of the English grammar which is discussed here is the gerunds and infinitives. According to Azar (1999), a gerund is the -ing form of a verb. It is used as noun and has the function similar to noun. Gerund can have a function as the subject of a sentence, for example;

- (1) Riding a motorcycle without a helmet is dangerous.

The word 'riding' in the sentences has the function as the subject. Besides, it can also be the object of preposition as the following;

- (2) I apologize to Ranya for making her wait for me for a long time.

Many prepositions can precede the gerunds. Some of the preposition are *to*, *about*, *in*, *of*, *without*, *from*, and *for*. In addition, gerunds can also be used as the object of verbs as can be seen below;

- (3) I postpone doing my homework.

Gerunds, besides they can be seen from their functions, they can also be seen from the kinds. The first one is the gerunds which has common preposition combination following them. It means that some words can only be combined with certain preposition and gerund. The examples of this common preposition combination followed by gerunds are *take advantage of, believe in, look forward to, insist on participate in, be interested in, apologize for, think about/of, be capable of, forgive (someone) for, etc.*

The second, gerunds that come after the word *go* in certain idiomatic expression to express, for the most part, recreational activities. The example of this kinds of gerunds are; *go boating, go jogging, go fishing, go hunting, go shopping, go swimming, go skating, etc.*

The third, some gerunds or the -ing form that follows certain special expressions. This kind is called special expression followed by -ing/gerund, for example:

(4) I had trouble finding his house.

Tarynne spends most of her time studying.

He is lying in bed reading a novel.

Meanwhile, infinitive is defined as the basic form of a verb. It is formulated as *to + the simple form of a verb*. In this study, the infinitives that are used are limited. First, the infinitives those come after some common words. These kinds of infinitives are divided into two groups that is A group: verb + infinitive and B group: verb + (pro) noun + infinitives, as can be seen below;

(5) I hope to see you again soon (verb + infinitive).

I expect Ranya to pass the university entrance test (verb + noun + infinitives).

The teacher told us to study harder (verb + (pro) noun + infinitives).

The next group is *It + infinitive* in which often the infinitives phrase is used with 'It' as the subject of a sentence, for example;

(6) It is difficult to learn a second language

Here, the word *it* refers to and has the same meaning as the infinitive phrase at the end of the sentence. An infinitive can also used as the subject of a sentence as gerund, but the used of 'it' as 'it + infinitive' is far more common, as can be seen in the following example;

(7) To learn a second language is difficult.

Gerunds and infinitives, beside they have their own kinds and functions, can also collaborate with each other. This kind of gerunds and infinitives is known as the common verb followed by gerunds and infinitives. They are, actually, divided into the verb + infinitives or gerunds, with no different in meaning, as can be seen below;

(8) I started to work or I started working.

and the verb + infinitives or gerunds, with a difference in meaning in the following example;

(9) I regret to tell you that you failed the test.

The sentence has the meaning as *regret to say, to tell someone, to inform someone of some bad news*. Compared to the following example;

(10) I regret lending him some money. He never paid me back.

In this sentences, the meaning of the word *regret lending* is *regret that something that happened in the past*.

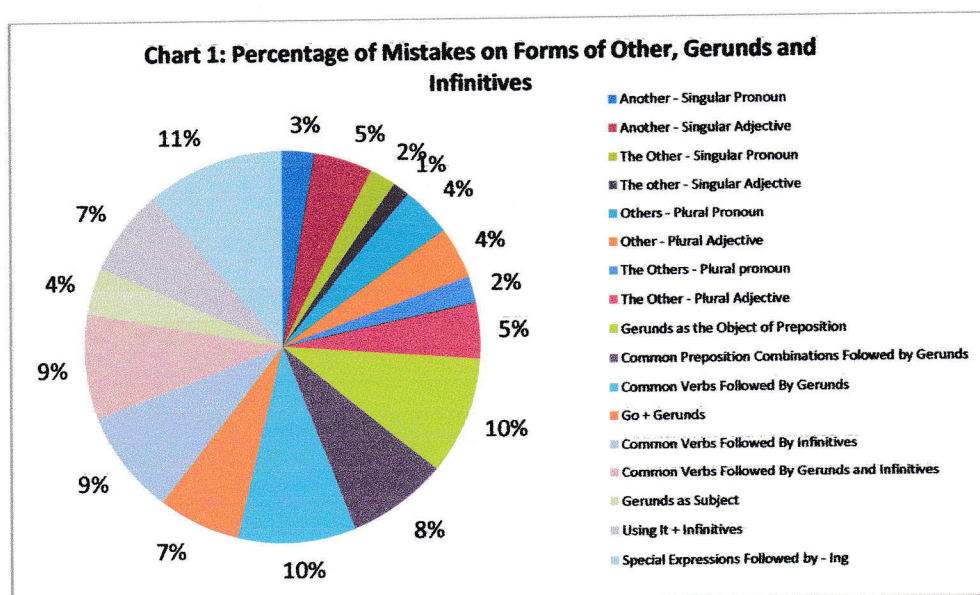
Methodology

This study is a descriptive quantitative study. A descriptive quantitative method is a study in which the researchers do not set up to test hypotheses, but rather to present with their focus and consequently the data, free to vary during the observation (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). The data was taken by using a set of questionnaire that consisted of 80 items designed based on the syllabus of the

Structure II course of the English education study program of University of Bengkulu. The questionnaire was made and modified from grammar exercises written by Azar (2003) in her book of *Fundamental of English Grammar* and *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. The participants of the study were the students of the second semester enrolled in 2007-2008 academic year. There were 36 students and total sampling was applied in this study. The procedures applied in this study were; (1) designing the test based on the material of forms of other, gerunds and infinitives based on the curriculum and the syllabus, (2) giving a test to the students after eight meetings of learning the materials of forms of other, gerunds and infinitives, (3) analyzing the test result, (4) categorizing the data of the test, and (5) interpreting the data. The data of the study were classified and counted by using percentage to determine the dominant ones among the materials.

Finding and Discussion

Among the materials of forms of other, gerunds and infinitives, the students' dominant mistakes are on the gerunds and infinitives materials. The three most dominant mistakes made by the students were on the category of *special expression followed by -ing* with the percentage of 11%, *gerunds as the object of prepositions* with 10% and *common verbs followed by gerunds* which also gains 10%. The detail percentage of the students' mistakes can be seen in the following chart 1:



This concept of gerunds and infinitives is indeed difficult to be mastered by the students because there are so many words to be remembered and rule to be comprehended. The most difficult one for the students is the *special expressions followed by-ing* category since there are many expressions here such as: *have a hard time*, *spend all day*, *had difficult*, *had a good time*, etc (Azar, 1999). These special expressions are always followed by gerunds. If the students remember the expressions and get the concepts, the material related to *special expressions followed by-ing* will be much easier to be understood. The easiest way to be succeeded in master this concept is by making the students familiar with these expressions, practicing using them in written and spoken more often and doing more exercises on them on English grammar books. An example of this *special expression followed by -ing* and the option is;

I was having a hard time my visa in 2002
 a. to get b. got c. getting d. gets

The correct answer among all options above is the one with -ing or verb+ ing or the present participle that is option c with the word "getting". The others that were difficult to comprehend are *the common verbs followed by gerund* and *the use of gerund as the object of preposition*. This is happened because there are so many verbs that can be followed by gerund and

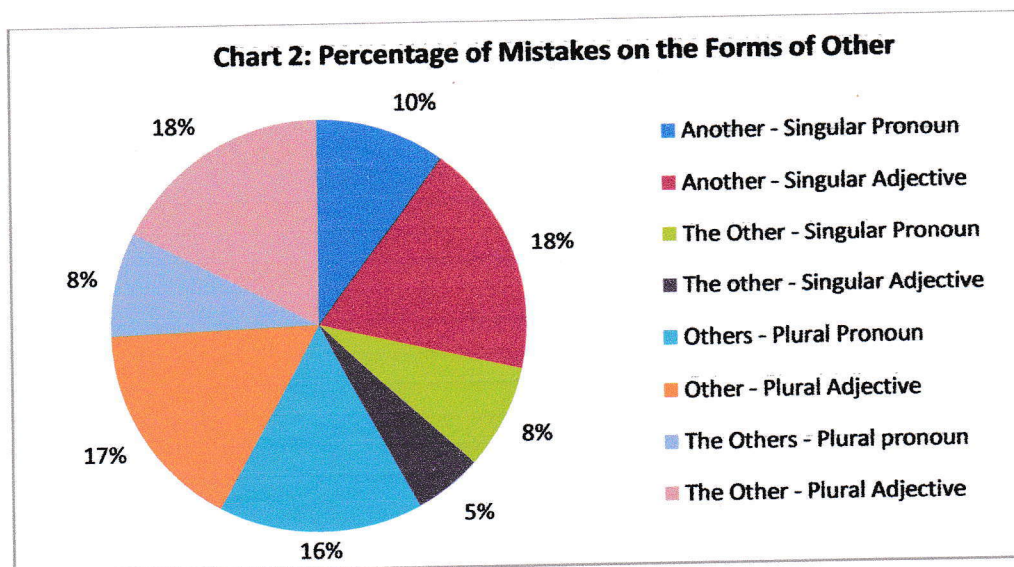
also because there are so many prepositions to be remembered that have their own pairs. The easiest ways to master them is by remembering and making them familiar with oneself. While for the infinitive materials, the most difficult category to be mastered is the *common verbs followed by infinitives*. This is also difficult because this category has many words and sometime they are interchangeable with the gerunds. In contrast, the least dominant one on the material of gerunds and infinitives is *the use of gerunds as subject* as in the following example:

The correct sentence with gerund as the subject is

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| a. <i>It is easy to speak English</i> | b. <i>Studying English is difficult</i> |
| c. <i>I am studying English now</i> | d. <i>To study English is difficult</i> |

The correct answer for this question is option (b) *studying English is difficult*. It is because this option supplies the use of gerund as subject which located in the part of the sentence. Likewise, the other options are; the use of it + infinitive as subject (option a), the use of verb + *ing* as the present participle in continuous sentence (option c), and the use of infinitives in a sentence (option d) are not gerunds. Basically, if the concepts are being understood by the students, if the students practice using them in spoken and written and they search for them in texts from books, short stories, novels or newspapers, the concepts will be a lot easier to be understood. This part of the concepts, gerunds as the subject is the easiest one among others to be understood.

Meanwhile for a more detail one on each of the materials of forms of other, gerunds and infinitives, it will be the next discussion in this paper. Among the material of forms of others, the three most dominant mistakes made by the students are on the category of *another as singular adjective* with the percentage of 18%, *the other as plural adjective* with the percentage of 18% and *other as plural adjective* with the percentage of 17%. The more detail percentage of mistakes made by the students can be seen in the following chart 2:



Singular and plural forms of other as part of the concept of forms of other are quite confusing if it is only seen at glance, but if the students get the key concept, it is very much easier to be used and seen in spoken or written. Most students at the English education study program will get the concept easier to understand if the teacher explains the concept by using graphs, figures, diagrams, or gestures such as by using fingers and by giving some examples of their uses in sentences or texts. The example of the figure is such as in figure 1 above. Asking the students to look for the real examples of it uses in short stories, texts in books and newspapers will give a lot more benefit in enhancing the students' comprehension on the concept.

In addition, the frequency of students' mistakes on the use of the concept of forms of other as plural adjective is higher than their comprehension on the singular forms of other. This can be happened because this concept is, in fact, quite difficult to be understood. It is rather difficult than the singular concept, even though the basic concept of their uses as adjective and pronoun are similar to

the singular concept above. Some students made mistakes probably because they confuse to differentiate the use of the article 'the' and the suffix 's' and also encounter problems to use them in sentences. In fact, the concept of their uses as pronoun and adjective are similar to the concept of singular forms of other above. The differences are only in their uses in plural form or in replacing the plural noun if they have functioned as pronoun. They precede the plural form of nouns if they have function as adjective in sentences.

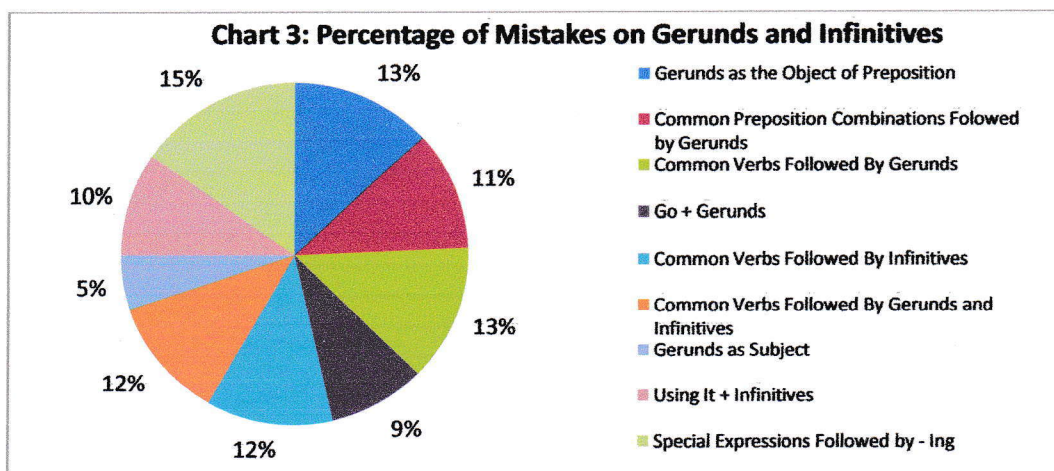
In further, these three dominant mistakes on the forms of other are on their functions as the adjective which come before nouns in English language. These mistakes occur could be because the concept of adjective comes before noun is different from the concept of the grammar of Indonesian language. In Indonesian, adjective come after the nouns such as 'baju bagus'. In this sentence, it can be seen that the word 'bagus' which has function as adjective come after the word 'baju'. Therefore, this can be understood as there is the interference of the students' first language or which is known as interlingual transfer (Brown, 2000; Erdogan, 2005).

Due to the condition, therefore a teacher in transferring this concept of forms of other to his/her students needs more efforts. The teacher also needs to use more examples of their uses in any English texts and some efforts in explaining the concepts. The following example (taken from question number 30-32 in the questionnaire) can be used as an example in explaining the concept to students.

Birds have different eating habits. Some birds eat insects, (30) ... (other)... birds get their food chiefly from plants. Others eat only fish. (31) ... (others)..... hunt small animals like mice and rabbits, (32) ... (the other)... birds prefer dead and rotting flesh.

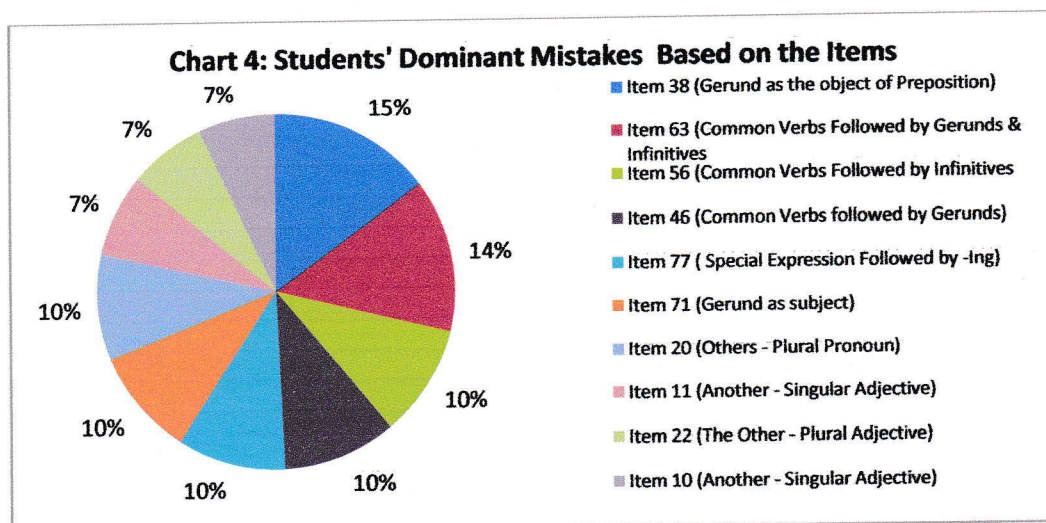
In that example, the answer to question number 30 is the word "other" and has a function as an adjective because there is a plural noun "birds" in front of the word. In addition, the answer to the next question is "others", it has function as pronoun because there is no plural noun in front of it but there is a verb "hunt". The last one, the answer is "the other" which function as adjective because there is a plural noun of "birds" followed the answer. Here, article "the" is used because it is the last one of all birds' eating habits. Even though this word "the other" similar to the one in the singular forms of other, it is not used as singular because the word following "the other" is plural not singular, so, it has function as plural adjective.

The next material which was investigated in the study is the concept and the uses of gerunds and infinitives. In this part of gerunds and infinitives, there is more variation than the forms of other. The three most frequent mistakes made by the student are on *special expressions followed by-ing* with the percentage of 15% and *common verb followed by gerunds* and *the use of gerunds as the object of prepositions* with percentage of 13% each. A more detail percentage of the students' mistakes on gerunds and infinitives material can be seen in chart 3 below;



The emerge of more mistakes on *special expressions followed by-ing*, *common verb followed by gerunds* and *the use of gerunds as the object of prepositions* could be resulting from the condition of rules existing in English language itself. There are many special expressions, many verbs followed by gerunds and there many prepositions in English to be mastered or remembered. In simply, again it is because there are the differences between the rules of Indonesian and English language grammar.

Finally, if the students' mistakes are seen based on the items of the questionnaire, there are ten items in which the students made more mistakes. The items are item 38 with the percentage of 15%, item 63 with 14%, item 56, 46, 77, 71, 20 with 10% for each, and 11, 22 and 10 with the percentage of 7% for each. The following chart 4 provides the information on those items in detail.



If it is seen from the items, the results support the previous findings that the students made more mistakes on the concept of gerunds and infinitives. These could be caused by the fact these gerunds and infinitives have more rules and variation on their uses. Their rules are different from Indonesian language and these finding confirms the opinion of Refnita (2007) who mentions that the difference between English grammar and Indonesian is one of the factors that inhibit the mastering of English by Indonesian students, especially the university students. Meanwhile for the forms of others, the one that quite difficult to be mastered by the students is the using of *others as plural pronoun*. This can be caused by the fact that in English language, there is countable and uncountable nouns and the students have probably not yet mastered that part of English grammar since there many nouns in English language. They could also have difficulties in replacing the nouns into the plural pronouns since this concept of singular and plural ended by using suffixes do not exist in Indonesian language.

Conclusion

The concept of forms of other, gerunds and infinitives is quite difficult and confusing for the English education study program students to be mastered because they have many rules in their uses, there are the interference of the students' first language (*interlingual transfer*) and the differences existing in English language and Indonesian language. Even though these concepts are difficult and confusing, the students need to know and master them well. If they can't master them, the mistakes they made in using the concepts will give a description on how depth their knowledge of the English grammar is. Among the concepts, the students made mistakes more frequently in gerunds and infinitives materials, especially on *special expression followed by -ing*, *gerunds as the object of prepositions* and *common verbs followed by gerunds* because there are many prepositions and verbs that have their own matches to be mastered and cannot be used arbitrarily. While for the concept of forms of others based on the ten dominant items, the most dominant one is *the use of others as plural pronoun*. The forms of other materials are a lot easier to be mastered than the gerunds and infinitives since they only have two functions, as adjective or pronoun. Therefore, the teacher teaching these concepts should give their full efforts in helping and making the students mastering the concepts. There are many efforts the teacher can do here, for instance by using diagrams, graphs, and charts and or by giving examples of their uses in sentences and English texts.

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